

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

December 18, 2012

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The State Department family includes nearly 70,000 men and women serving here in Washington and at more than 275 posts around the world. I am responsible for every one of them, and I am enormously proud to be a part of their team.

Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty – four brave Americans who dedicated themselves to serving and protecting our country – were killed during the terrorist attacks on our compounds in Benghazi, Libya on the night of September 11, 2012.

When some of our own lose their lives in service to our country, we must determine what went wrong, and we must learn from it. To fully honor those we lost, we must better protect those still serving to advance our nation's vital interests and values overseas. There is nobody more committed to doing so than I am.

That same week in September, we saw violent attacks on our embassies in Cairo, Sanaa, Tunis, and Khartoum, as well as large protests outside many other posts around the world where thousands of our diplomats serve. In the weeks that followed, we saw terrorist groups in North Africa trying to expand their reach and to destabilize the emerging democracies of the Arab Awakening. All of this amounts to an urgent strategic challenge to the interests and values of the United States in a rapidly changing region.

In the hours and days after the attacks, even as we grieved for our fallen friends and colleagues, I directed action on three fronts:

- First, we took immediate steps to further protect our people and posts in high threat areas, working closely with the Department of Defense. We closely monitored embassies and consulates facing large protests, dispatched emergency security teams, adjusted our post posture, reviewed reporting from the Intelligence Community, and took additional precautions across the board.
- Second, I ordered an investigation to determine exactly what happened in Benghazi and to recommend steps to help improve our security.
- Third, we intensified a diplomatic campaign aimed at combating the threat of terrorism across North Africa and bolstering the region's emerging democracies.

I would like to update you on all three efforts and assure you that we are fixing what is not working, protecting our people, and honoring our fallen colleagues by continuing to champion America's interests and values.

Today I sent you the classified report of the Accountability Review Board chaired by Ambassador Thomas Pickering. His team included Vice Chair and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, as well as Hugh Turner, Richard Shinnick, and Catherine Bertini. These are dedicated public servants with long experience in diplomacy, the military, intelligence, development, and management.

In accordance with the law, I asked this distinguished group to conduct a thorough, candid, and independent examination of the Benghazi attacks. I urged them to work quickly and carefully. I directed everyone at the State Department to cooperate fully, because the families of the fallen, the members of our Department family, and the American people deserve to know what happened.

The Accountability Review Board report provides a clear-eyed look at serious, systemic challenges that we have already begun to fix. I am grateful for its recommendations for how we can reduce the chances of this kind of tragedy happening again. I accept every one of them.

I asked the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources to lead a task force at the State Department to ensure that the Board's recommendations are implemented quickly and completely, as well as to pursue steps above and beyond those recommended in the Board's report. This group has already begun meeting, and the Deputy Secretary, along with the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, the Undersecretary for Management, the Director General of the Foreign Service, and the Deputy Legal Advisor are driving this effort forward.

Because of steps we began taking in the hours and days after the attacks, this work is well underway. We will have implementation of every recommendation underway by the time the next Secretary of State takes office. There is no higher priority for me or my Department.

All of us – from senior Department leadership setting strategic priorities to supervisors evaluating the needs of individual posts to Congressional committees appropriating funds and providing oversight – have a responsibility to provide the men and women who serve this country with the best possible security and support. Most of all, it is my responsibility as Secretary of State.

Let me turn to the steps we have been taking and will continue to take as we implement the ARB's recommendations.

- After the attacks, I ordered a worldwide review of our overall security posture, with particular scrutiny for high-threat posts. We asked the Department of Defense to deploy personnel to serve on five Interagency Security Assessment Teams focused on these dangerous locations. For more than two hundred years, the United States – like every other country around the world – has relied upon host nations to provide security for our embassies and consulates. This responsibility is enshrined in the Vienna Convention and is the bedrock of international diplomacy. In today's environment, however, we have to take a harder look at the capabilities and commitment of our hosts – and how we support our diplomats and development experts in places where national security forces are fragmented and political will may be weak.
- We are partnering with the Pentagon to dispatch hundreds of additional Marine Security Guards to bolster our posts.

- We are realigning resources in our 2013 budget request to address physical vulnerabilities and reinforce structures where needed, including with the goal of reducing the risks from fire. To do so we will need your partnership in ensuring we have the authority to streamline mandatory processes and produce faster results.
- We are working to hire additional Diplomatic Security personnel and to provide them with the equipment and training they need to face today's security challenges. Over the past four years, I have been privileged to get to know many of these brave men and women. I trust them with my life. They are professionals and patriots who serve in many parts of the world where there are no Marines on post and little or no U.S. military presence in country. They are committed to learning from what happened in Benghazi and to constantly improving. We look forward to partnering with the Congress to get this done.

As we make these improvements in the field, we are also making changes here in Washington.

- I named the first-ever Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for High Threat Posts within the Bureau of Diplomatic Security so those Missions that face high risks in dangerous places get the attention they need. We are also updating our deployment procedures to increase the number of experienced and well-trained staff serving at those posts.
- We are also working on how we make decisions within the Department on when, where, and how our people operate, including ensuring that regional Assistant Secretaries assume greater responsibility and accountability for their people and posts. Each and every one of our Ambassadors are charged by the President to "take direct and full responsibility" for the security of all personnel under their authority "whether inside or outside the chancery gate." The leadership of our regional bureaus will be embracing the same accountability and responsibility for the staff serving in these areas.

Finally, I have initiated a number of additional steps above and beyond the Board's 29 recommendations, including:

- Instituting periodic reviews of the Department's 15-20 more high threat posts by Interagency Security Assessment Teams.
- Mandating an annual High Threat Post Review chaired by the Secretary.
- Strengthening mutual security arrangements between the State Department and other government agencies in places where they are not co-located.
- Regularizing protocols for sharing with Congress significant security events involving or against Department personnel or facilities.

We will provide the Committee with a comprehensive report on all the measures we are taking to implement the Board's recommendations and improve security at our posts around the world.

We will also look to you for support and guidance. This is about resources, because while it is absolutely critical that our people have what they need to get the job done, Congress has a bigger role than that. You travel the world, you visit our posts, you get to know our diplomats on the ground and the challenges they face. You know what is at stake – America's vital national security interests. You know that the work they do to help secure our country must continue unabated, and so we need you to take an active role in this process and to share our sense of responsibility and urgency.

Finally, let me turn to our diplomatic campaign, because it is not enough to just play better defense. We have to do more on offense as well.

A number of factors have combined to present a serious strategic challenge to the United States in North Africa and the wider region. The Arab revolutions have scrambled power dynamics and shattered security forces. Instability in Mali has created an expanding safe haven for terrorists. The decimation of al Qaeda's central leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan has led to growing ambitions among the terror network's far-flung affiliates, including al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and in the Arabian Peninsula.

These are not new concerns. Indeed they have been a top priority for our entire national security team. However, after Benghazi we accelerated a diplomatic campaign focused on enhancing our counterterrorism engagement across North Africa.

In the first hours and days after the terrorist attack, I pressed the issue in conversations and meetings with the President of Libya and the Foreign Ministers of Tunisia and Morocco. Two weeks later, I met again with leaders from across the region during the United Nations General Assembly in New York, and at a special meeting focused on the crisis in Mali and the Sahel. In October, I flew to Algeria to discuss the fight against al Qaeda in North Africa and strengthen our security ties. Just last week, I sent Deputy Secretary Bill Burns to co-chair the Global Counterterrorism Forum in Abu Dhabi and a meeting in Tunis of leaders working to build new democracies and reform security services.

In all these diplomatic engagements, and in near-constant contacts at every level, we are focused on confronting al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and helping our partners in North Africa target its support structure -- closing safe havens, cutting off finances, countering extremist ideology, and slowing the flow of new recruits.

We continue to hunt the terrorists responsible for the attacks in Benghazi and are determined to bring them to justice. Our embassy in Tripoli has intervened at the highest levels of the Libyan government to secure its support for the FBI investigation, and we continue to assist in every way we can.

Our Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership is building the capacity of ten countries across the region, providing training and support so that they can tighten border security, disrupt terrorist networks, and prevent attacks. We are partnering with security officials who are moving away from the repressive approaches that helped fuel radicalization in the past and instead are developing strategies grounded in the rule of law and human rights.

At the same time, we are using our diplomatic and economic tools to support the emerging democracies of the region, including Libya. Ultimately, that is the best way to advance our interests and values, as well as to provide the region a path away from extremism. That is why Chris Stevens was in Benghazi to begin with. He knew that a new Libya was being born there, and that

America had to be part of it – to support reformers, counter extremism, and stem the dangerous flow of weapons. He believed in this work, and he made a difference.

In the days after the terrorist attack on our post, tens of thousands of Libyans poured into the streets to mourn Ambassador Stevens. They overran extremist bases and insisted that militias disarm and accept the rule of law. It was as inspiring a sight as any we saw in the revolutions across the region.

In the end, we will never prevent every act of terrorism or achieve perfect security. Our diplomats cannot work in bunkers and do their jobs. When America is absent, especially from the dangerous places, there are consequences. Extremism takes root, our interests suffer, and our security at home is threatened. We must accept a level of risk to protect this country we love and to advance our interests and values around the world.

It is our responsibility to constantly improve, to reduce the risks our people face, and to make sure they have the resources they need to do their jobs. I have no higher priority, and no greater responsibility. We have a roadmap for strengthening our security and improving our systems. We look to this Committee to be our partners in that work. Let's get this done together. It is what the men and women who serve our country overseas deserve. They represent the best traditions of a bold and generous nation, and they are no strangers to danger.

Benghazi joins a long list: hostages taken in Tehran in 1979, our embassy and Marine barracks bombed in Beirut in 1983, Khobar Towers in 1996, our embassies in East Africa in 1998, consulate staff murdered in Jeddah in 2004, the Khost tragedy in 2009, and so many others.

The United States refuses to be intimidated. We will not retreat. We will continue to do what America always does: pull together, learn, and emerge stronger and better. We will keep leading and engaging, including in those hard places where America's interests and values are at stake.

Since I was sworn in as Secretary of State, I have had the privilege of leading some of the finest men and women I have ever known. Every one of them is my responsibility, and I will do everything in my power to keep them

safe. I have no higher priority. You are important partners in these efforts, and I look forward to continuing our work together.

With best regards, I am

Sincerely yours,


Hillary Rodham Clinton

cc: The Honorable Richard G. Lugar
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Chairman, House Committee on Foreign Affairs
The Honorable Howard L. Berman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs